

## The conceptual focus of ultimism: an object of religious concern for the nones and somes

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**Abstract:** In his recent trilogy, J. L. Schellenberg presents a new religious option: to have beliefless faith in a general object of religious concern that he thinks is referenced at the core of most sectarian religions – the axiological, soteriological, and metaphysical ultimate, which I call ‘UUU’. After explaining what UUU is more fully, I argue that the claim that UUU exists should not be, as Schellenberg says, the only focus for philosophy of religion. Still, I argue that such a claim is a good basis for a new form of religion, especially if it is modified in a couple of ways.

Since at least the early 1990s, an increasing number of Americans have self-identified as ‘nones’ – as having no religious affiliation.<sup>1</sup> In addition to the political reasons for this trend, I see at least two philosophical factors contributing to it. First, many of us are sceptics, finding too much to doubt and too little to believe in religion. Second, we are intensely aware of religious diversity, reluctant to commit to one tradition in the midst of what seem to be epistemically equal peers.

In his recent trilogy, J. L. Schellenberg has developed a new form of religion that takes us as we are on both counts, in two big steps.<sup>2</sup> First, regarding scepticism, he recommends we stop believing and disbelieving in religion since both are premature, in light of our limited grasp of ultimate things and our early placement near the start of a possible billion years of human evolution. He recommends that we approach religion instead with *beliefless* faith. Schellenberg’s kind of faith is emphatically not a Pascalian will to believe – a will to undo an underlying attitude of non-belief – but rather a will to imagine, assent to, and act on a claim about ultimate things whose truth is in doubt.

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His second major recommendation, in response to religious diversity, is to stop having faith in a religiously sectarian object, such as God or Brahman or the Dao etc., and instead have faith in the more general thing (*res*) that would exist if God or Brahman or the Dao etc. were real – the axiological, soteriological, and metaphysical ultimate, which I will call ‘UUU’ since it is ultimate in three ways (e.g. Schellenberg (2009), 1–2, 15–17). For religiously interested sceptics, this new possible form of religious commitment – beliefless faith in UUU – is exciting: it is an internally honest way to be religious that does not play favourites among the world’s religions.

There are thus two moving parts to Schellenberg’s new religious option: the attitude of beliefless faith, and the object of this attitude, UUU. My focus here will be on the object, and more broadly on ‘ultimism’, the claim that UUU exists. After explaining ultimism more fully, I argue that ultimism should not be, as Schellenberg says, the only focus for philosophy of religion. Still, I argue, ultimism articulates a viable object of religious concern, especially if it is modified in a couple of ways.

### **What ultimism is**

As implied above, Schellenberg identifies the focus of his new religion, UUU, as the thing, if any, that is metaphysically ultimate (which I sometimes abbreviate as Mu, where ‘u’ is an object of religious concern and M is the property of being metaphysically ultimate), axiologically ultimate (Au), and soteriologically ultimate (Su). He explicitly avoids precisifying these conjuncts much further in order to allow for various interpretations of them – allowing ultimism to abstract from as many actual and possible objects of religious concern as possible, and thus to keep it literally general, now and as our knowledge grows.<sup>3</sup> Still, in what he describes as ‘a balancing act’, he wants ultimism to have genuine content. So he provides some barebones sense of each of its conjuncts, as follows.

By ‘metaphysical ultimacy’, Schellenberg means that UUU’s ‘existence is explanatorily the most basic fact’ or that ‘it is deepest, most fundamental in the nature of things’.<sup>4</sup> These two glosses are distinct: to use Aristotelian jargon, one could read the former as a claim that UUU is the universe’s efficient cause (think e.g. deism), and the latter that UUU is the universe’s material cause, its stuff (think e.g. monism). In the spirit of keeping ultimism open, Schellenberg accepts either or both interpretations. He just wants UUU to be metaphysically fundamental in some way.

By ‘axiological ultimacy’, Schellenberg means what classical theists traditionally do by ‘perfection’: that UUU has greatness along all of its categories of being. Analytic philosophers of religion may immediately jump to the conclusion that UUU thus has the traditional perfections of the God of classical theism, but Schellenberg explicitly cautions against this, again in an effort to keep ultimism

open to the many understandings of what greatness or value across being might be. Importantly, Schellenberg is open to UUU's being personal *or* impersonal,<sup>5</sup> and that impacts what UUU's perfection can look like, since what it takes for an impersonal being to be perfect is different from a personal one. So while a *personal* UUU's axiological ultimacy might amount to being perfect in e.g. power, knowledge, goodness, presence, simplicity, etc., an *impersonal* UUU's axiological ultimacy would not involve e.g. knowledge or goodness, since these require conscious intention. Notice this is one way in which theism (the claim that a personal God exists) is more specific than ultimism (the claim that UUU exists).

By 'soteriological ultimacy', Schellenberg means that UUU is 'the source of an ultimate good (salvific)' for 'humankind . . . often with ramifications that are said to embrace the whole world'.<sup>6</sup> In other words, UUU shares this soteriological respect with Aquinas's God, who is the *telos* of our being, and with Śaṅkara's Brahman, of whom Rama Puligandla says: 'experience and knowledge of Brahman . . . is the pinnacle of human achievement – *summum bonum*'.<sup>7</sup>

'Ultimate' in all three of these conjuncts is to be read as 'in some way unlimited', to protect ultimism from counterexamples that might trivialize it.<sup>8</sup> So UUU is not just a deep reality but an unlimited reality, not just valuable but of unsurpassable value, etc.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, notice the conjunction here: UUU is identified not by just one of these conjuncts but by all three; all three are *de dicto* necessary, and as far as I can tell sufficient, for something to count as UUU, i.e.  $UUU \leftrightarrow (Mu \ \& \ Au \ \& \ Su)$ . The conjunction makes it a high bar indeed to be UUU: it is difficult enough to be either metaphysically fundamental to the universe, *or* the greatest value in it, *or* the deepest source of human or universal fulfilment, but UUU must be all three of these things at once. Schellenberg says that he conjoined these conditions in order to distinguish ultimism from views he thought were not robust enough to count as religious; he takes Mu alone, for instance, to be consistent with non-religious materialism. But the conjunction is in tension with Schellenberg's view that ultimism is 'completely simple', since it could be made simpler by dropping one or more of its conjuncts.<sup>10</sup> I will return to this point later.

For those of us steeped in classical theism, it is helpful to see that UUU, so understood, runs conceptually close to the God of classical theism in two ways: it is perfect, in light of the axiological component, and it is unlimited. These similarities indicate that the apple has not fallen far from the tree: for all Schellenberg's efforts to distance ultimism from traditional theism, it carries significant pieces of that long lineage.

So far the idea of UUU may seem technical, dry. Schellenberg makes it vivid in (2009), in the mouth of his envisioned 'Anselmian sceptic' who is in the course of arguing for faith in to the Ultimate:

Look at this amazing idea – just look at it. And since you're trying to apprehend the idea of something that is the unity of deepest fact and deepest value, you're going to need to let

your emotions become engaged too . . . if it exists, [UUU] is in a sense the fullest possible extension of everything that has ever impressed its reality upon you or mattered to you. Every curving mountain ridge, every baby's newborn cry, every leap of your heart, and every being that does or could elicit it – the reality you are thinking of is somehow responsible for all of this and manifests everything good and real in it ten thousand times more deeply. And now remember also the salvific content of the idea – that we are thinking of something that, if it exists, involves the positive transformation and fulfillment of our existence, perhaps already realized but in ways we cannot recognize because in our limitations and immaturity we haven't been seeing things as they truly are.<sup>11</sup>

So UUU is all at once (i) deepest and unlimited fact (Mu), (ii) deepest and unlimited value (Au), and (iii) deepest and unlimited source of fulfillment for humans, perhaps for the universe as a whole (Su). I sense that if we could really grasp the idea of UUU – just the idea, realized or not – it would for that moment take our breath away.<sup>12</sup>

### **Ultimism as an exclusive focus of philosophy of religion**

Schellenberg puts the idea of UUU to at least two main uses: he suggests it is (a) the proper focus for philosophy of religion, and (b) the object of faith in his new way of being religious. I will argue in this section that (a) is a misuse of the idea of UUU, and in the next that (b) is not.

Why does Schellenberg think that ultimism is the proper focus for philosophy of religion – that philosophers should discuss only ultimistic forms of religion, at least for now? A single paragraph in his introductory article here nicely brings together many pages from Schellenberg (2005) in response to this question:

The reason for linking ultimism to religion at all, one fleshed out in *PR*, is that ultimistic elements can be found in all or most religion. As I also argue there, even if a one-size-fits-all definition of 'religion' (in the personal – as opposed to institutional – sense that has concerned me) cannot be built on this fact, there is good reason, given the distinctive concerns of philosophy, to accept

- (3) Ultimistic forms of religion – practices involving adherence to ultimism or some proposition entailing it – are the proper focus for philosophy of religion.

Philosophers, with their love of the most fundamental understanding, are interested in the deepest truths about fact and value. And ultimistic propositions might conceivably do a lot of work for someone so interested. This, I think, helps to explain why theism has had such a rich history in philosophy, and still today is used to generate answers to philosophical questions. I infer that a restriction of our attention (at least initially) to ultimistic religion is a rather natural restriction for philosophers of religion to accept. Besides, a new focus on ultimism would involve an appropriate widening of concern after today's preoccupation with theism, while not excluding the latter, which represents one way in which ultimism could be true.<sup>13</sup>

I could not agree more with Schellenberg's desire to widen the focus of philosophy of religion from its focus on theism, and indeed from the very specific form of it, classical theism, which has been slowing creative work on the major issues in the field for years, perhaps for centuries.

My complaint here is rather that ultimism does not go far *enough* in widening our focus, and certainly not far enough to define 'religion' in terms of ultimism, as Schellenberg suggests. This is because, in short, we have no good reasons to make ultimism the focus of the field, and in fact have a good reason *not* to do so. Turn first to the lack of good reasons to make it our focus. Schellenberg's two main reasons for doing so are visible in the quote above: (1) 'ultimistic elements can be found in all or most religion' and (2) a focus on ultimism facilitates 'the distinctive concerns of philosophy... [namely] the deepest truths about fact and value'.<sup>14</sup> Let me explain why neither convinces me, which will take some time in the case of (1) since it is more involved than it first appears.

Schellenberg's main claim in (1) is that the idea of UUU is the bare conceptual skeleton on which the various traditional, sectarian religions hang details in order to fill out their own unique understanding of God or Brahman or the Dao, etc. So the Jewish God is UUU in one particular way – e.g. metaphysically ultimate by being efficient but not material cause of the universe, and axiologically ultimate by having all the personal-style perfections listed above, and soteriologically ultimate by being such that our deepest goodness is found in right relationship with It – while the Hindu Brahman is UUU in an entirely other particular way – e.g. metaphysically ultimate by being *both* efficient and material cause, and axiologically ultimate by having all the *impersonal*-style perfections listed above, and soteriologically ultimate by being such that our deepest good is found in realizing our *identity* with It. Since ultimism is what all these disparate views have in common, ultimism is religion's 'forgotten center', its 'intellectual heart', that which 'all... [particular sectarian] religious propositions can be seen as gesturing toward'.<sup>15</sup> Logically speaking, according to Schellenberg, the particular sectarian religions *entail* ultimism (2009, 15).

The thought implicit in (1) is thus that the idea of UUU is a shared conceptual core of all, or at least most, religious objects. This makes (1) a new instance of an old move. There were many in favour of such a shared core before Schellenberg – from Cicero to Bahá'u'lláh to Huxley to Hick, to name a few.<sup>16</sup> Recently, out of respect for religious particularity and difference, it has been more in vogue to deny a shared core, and to say instead that the world's religions are *irreducibly* plural. Stephen Prothero (2010) argues this, for instance, and Miroslav Volf agrees on the back cover: 'Enough... of the false and dangerous idea that all religions are the same!' One can imagine Prothero and Volf and the many others like them replying to Schellenberg's (1) by saying that *nothing* 'can be found in all or most religion', not ultimism, not anything else.

I basically agree with Prothero–Volf types here (more later), but what is subtle about Schellenberg’s view is that he would too, at least somewhat. He admits outright in Schellenberg (2005) that there are religious forms that seem non-ultimistic because they limit their objects of concern, and offers as examples the Greek and Norse religions whose gods are metaphysically limited at least by each other. And we could multiply examples of limited objects of religious concern from living traditions too, e.g. interpretations of Native American, Hindu, and Akan traditions, to name a few.<sup>17</sup>

The crucial problem is that Schellenberg undersells the *importance* of these non-ultimistic impulses in his next moves. He says that even those that do not think of their objects of religious concern as UUU still ‘exhibit a *tendency* to treat [these objects] and indeed the concern itself, as ultimate’; for instance, the Greeks and Norse worshiped their gods, and ‘worship is a form of ultimization’.<sup>18</sup> He says further that, even if some religions only tend to ultimize, at least what he calls the ‘paradigm instances’ of religion in Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam fully ultimize.<sup>19</sup> The implication is that, all told, religions are ultimizing enough that the field can safely ignore the non-ultimistic elements in them.

But first and emphatically: the five ‘paradigm’ religions do *not* have the UUU idea at their core, full stop. Some of the models of the ultimate of these five traditions do not entail that UUU exists. Here I talk in terms of ‘models’, meaning interpretations or conceptions, of the ultimate implicit in the religions because talk of entire religions in this context is crucially ambiguous in light of the enormous disagreement within even a single religion about the nature of the ultimate at its focus.<sup>20</sup> Within the Christian tradition alone, for instance, there are the classical models of the Christian God referenced earlier (God as entirely distinct from the world and necessarily perfect), neo-classical models (God as entirely distinct from the world but lacking one or more of the traditional perfections), pantheistic models (God as not entirely distinct from the world, since the world is in God, but God is also more than the world), process models (God as the divine end of a cosmic process of becoming), etc. Moreover, each of these models has particular instances. So Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, etc. instance a classical model; Klaas Kraay, Yujin Nagasawa, Richard Rice, etc. a neo-classical one, etc.<sup>21</sup>

Now some of the models of the object of religious concern in Schellenberg’s paradigmatic religions do entail ultimism, including the classical, neo-classical, open, and many process interpretations of the God of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and some standard interpretations of Brahman and the Dao in Hinduism and Daoism.<sup>22</sup> But what matters here is that a significant number of them do *not*. Some deny the *unlimited* force of the conjuncts of ultimism (taking their objects to be Mu & Au & Su, but in limited ways); some *drop conjuncts* altogether (lacking at least one of Mu, Au, or Su). To offer just one Christian example of both types, consider first my own functional theology, which takes God to have only at least what it takes to stand in the divine end of a relational role specified by the key texts

of the Christian tradition, such as being the source of the world and its flourishing, the object of religious experiences, etc.<sup>23</sup> It does not take an unlimited degree of reality to do this, so God may be limited. Or, as an example of a model that denies one of ultimism's conjuncts altogether, consider John Bishop's Christian 'end of being theology',<sup>24</sup> which identifies God as the end or *telos* of the universe. On a cue from I John 4:8 and in an effort to ensure that God neither causes nor permits suffering, Bishop keeps versions of Au and Su by identifying God as strictly Love, the highest good and our highest good, but drops Mu by taking God not to cause or be the stuff of the universe but rather to merely 'come to exist' in a brute-fact universe filled with suffering which God resists and eventually overcomes. There are many other examples we could add here – John Bacon's Jewish-inspired end of being theology, which keeps Mu and Su but drops Au, Rita Gross's grasp of Buddhist ultimacy as Emptiness which is wholly natural, not transcendent, and in the end, like my view, limited, etc.<sup>25</sup> The UUU claim is just not the heart of all models of the ultimate in the five paradigm religions.

Moreover, not all non-ultimistic models tend to ultimize. To reply to one of Schellenberg's arguments for thinking they do, ultimization is neither necessary for worship (the Greeks worshipped their gods in response to certain providential functions they perceive them to play, functions that do not require their being unlimited in any way) nor sufficient (would we worship an absolutely unlimited being that never has nor ever will interact with us in any way?). Also, some models do not tend to ultimize because their entire *raison d'être* is non-ultimistic; the whole point of my functional notion of God, for instance, is precisely to deny God's unlimitedness.

A move to focus philosophy of religion on just ultimistic models would thus leave out numerous models of the object of religious concern in both the non-paradigmatic and paradigmatic religions. It would narrow the attention of philosophers of religion from all of religion to a proper subset of it, the ultimistic subset – generating a central mistake in the field.

Now at moments, as in (2) above, Schellenberg seems to grasp this point, but persists in saying it is *better* for the field to ignore these non-ultimistic voices, since a focus on ultimism facilitates a 'no-holds-barred... discovery of the deepest truths about the nature of reality and... goodness and value'.<sup>26</sup> However, a focus on ultimism might *foreclose* such discovery, since the non-ultimistic views it excludes might *be* 'the deepest truths about the nature of reality and... goodness and value'. For example, I developed my notion of a functional God to resolve the many problems of incoherence of the perfections plaguing the classical one; Bishop dropped God's creating the universe to make God not responsible for the suffering within it; deists dropped their God's axiological and soteriological components as excess explanatory baggage. I am not claiming (here at least) that these views actually solve the problem of incoherence or the problem of evil or concerns about ontological parsimony, but one or more of them might. So a

philosophy of religion that does not even invite them to the table for discussion might in virtue of this fail to get to truth. Schellenberg does suggest that non-ultimistic models could be reserved for later exploration if need be.<sup>27</sup> But might not our deepest questions about value and reality be answered in limited ways? We do not yet know, so such views should be under discussion from the beginning.

Thus, Schellenberg's main reasons for limiting the focus of the field to ultimism are unconvincing. We also have at least one reason not to limit our focus in this way, in light of the many models it silences: it would be unhelpful politically. 'The needs and obligations of philosophy of religion' which Schellenberg references – and which I am so grateful to him for referencing since the public impact of our work is too little discussed – include responding to the reality of *lived* religion. Marginalizing the non-ultimistic forms would make the field's grasp on religion less accurate – a step in the wrong direction in a world full of complicated religious situations that urgently require accurate philosophical reflection.

So we should not make ultimism the sole focus of philosophy of religion. As a corollary, we should not define 'religion' in terms of ultimism, as Schellenberg also recommends.<sup>28</sup> This is because we should identify intensions for our terms that gets their extensions right, and defining 'religion' with the intension of ultimism would get its extension wrong, as we have just seen, by making views we all agree are religious (Greek, Norse, Bishop's, etc.) *not* religious.<sup>29</sup> This finding means that Schellenberg should limit some key claims in his trilogy from religion *per se* to ultimism in particular, in order to clarify that they refer to just that subset of religion of which ultimism is the core. For example, he should not conclude that scepticism about and faith in *religion per se* is justified, only that scepticism about and faith in *ultimism* is. Similarly, he should call the new religion he develops not 'sceptical religion' but 'sceptical ultimism'.<sup>30</sup>

The name 'sceptical ultimism' is not only accurate but also reveals how the two big moving parts of Schellenberg's programme can be separated from each other to yield multiple new religious options. The first part – sceptical faith – can be trained not only on the tenets of ultimism to form sceptical ultimism but also on the tenets of traditional religions too, to form e.g. sceptical Judaism, sceptical Hinduism, etc. The second part – ultimism – can be the object of other propositional attitudes besides sceptical faith. One could, for example, be a 'believing ultimist', which would mirror traditional forms of being a believing Jew, a believing Hindu, etc., but with UUU as object instead of God, Brahman, etc.

### **Ultimism as an object of religious concern**

Although ultimism is not a good focus or definition of 'religion' for philosophy of religion, it still articulates a strong object of religious concern for use in the trilogy and beyond. Here I will explain why and then in closing offer a suggestion.

Sceptical ultimism is a new member of a second-order class of religious forms that incorporate *other* first-order religious forms. It joins venerable members of this class such as Bahá'í and Unitarianism. The power of these second-order forms is that they handle multiple religious traditions with even-handed respect in a way that many of us want. Ultimism strikes me as a more philosophically appealing second-order religion than either Bahá'í or Unitarianism.<sup>31</sup> Bahá'í relies on a new revelation from Bahá'u'lláh to frame its object of concern as a God who is an 'omnipotent', 'omniscient', 'supernatural' 'creator' of the universe. Ultimism, in contrast, relies on reason (always more palatable to philosophers!) and frames its object of religious concern more broadly, in a way that includes non-theistic, impersonal ultimates found in, for example, Asian traditions. Ultimism also names in UUU a metaphysical *res* as its object of concern in a way that Unitarianism does not, since Unitarianism's seven principles of faith eschew talk of metaphysics in favour of ethics (e.g. 'The inherent worth and dignity of every person; Justice, equity and compassion in human relations', etc.). Ultimism's commitment to a *res* strikes me as a good thing in a second-order religion: it adds substance and specificity, and allows it to respect more deeply the essence of the first-order faiths it covers by maintaining their attempt to connect with some sacred thing.

Ultimism also has several additional philosophical advantages that come from its use of a *genus-species relation* to incorporate the first-order traditions it covers. That is, UUUness functions as a genus with the sectarian objects of religious concern as its species, each instantiating UUUness in its own unique way, e.g. by being an impersonal material cause, or a personal efficient one, etc. The key point is that this genus-species relation makes *sceptical ultimism have as its object of concern the same thing its species do, just under a more general description*. One advantage of this, as Schellenberg points out, is that it makes UUU more likely to exist than any of its species, since it exists if *any* of them do. It also makes sceptical ultimism *deeply* interreligious – not just by borrowing practices, ethics, or texts from a variety of traditions as in Unitarianism – but by having in UUU an object of religious concern all the species literally share with it. In addition, it makes it easier for a traditionalist to convert to ultimism: they are not giving up on their previous object of religious concern; they see it now without the details. Finally, the genus-species relation makes ultimism a good basis for religion for people with multiple religious identities – people who practise more than one form of religion, the 'somes' of my title – because it enables them to have the same thing in mind when they move between practices. For instance, 'Jew-Bu's' can understand the Emptiness they reach in Buddhist meditation to be literally the same thing as the God they reach in Jewish forms of prayer if they take their object to be UUU in both instances.

For all these reasons, ultimism provides a basis for a philosophically exciting second-order religion. But it might still fall prey to Prothero and Volf's worry intimated in the last section: it may trivialize the differences between religions by saying that they all have the UUU idea at bottom. I have two thoughts in reply.

First – and this is a move open to Hick as well – Schellenberg should just admit that he does not intend sceptical ultimism to cover all religions, rather just the ultimistic ones. The first-order views sceptical ultimism would incorporate would then not be pressed into a mould they do not fit. Deciding not to take ultimism as the focus or the defining idea of ‘religion’ for philosophy of religion as I recommended earlier would free him up to do this.

Second, even apart from this move, Schellenberg seems better able to reply to the particularity concern than Hick. While Hick says that all religious views have one specific kind of soteriological component – they all aim to move us from self-to reality-centredness – Schellenberg says they all have some ultimate soteriological component *or other*, some ultimate metaphysical component *or other*, and some ultimate axiological component *or other*, without naming any specific one. This more general framing lets Schellenberg tolerate more diversity in his species than Hick, and thus better respects the species’ particularity.

My closing suggestion is that Schellenberg could do even more to permit diversity by opening out his view in two steps:

(1) Relax the ultimacy at issue from being unlimited to being just better than anything else in the actual world.<sup>32</sup>

(2) Make the U claims *disjuncts* instead of *conjuncts*. So instead of  $UUU \leftrightarrow (Mu \ \& \ Au \ \& \ Su)$ , let the new  $UUU' \leftrightarrow (Mu \ \text{or} \ Au \ \text{or} \ Su)$ , permitting combinations of the U claims to be sufficient for being ultimate, pending consideration on a case-by-case basis about whether the combination is strong enough to count as a view of the ultimate. For instance, as Schellenberg says, we might not want to include Mu *per se* as ultimate, since this is compatible with straight ‘non-religious materialism’, and perhaps not Au *per se* either, which he calls ‘cosmic pessimism’, since what is Au, in not being Su, is ‘forever out of our reach’.<sup>33</sup> Most of the rest of the combinations seem ultimate for reasons I relegate to an endnote, but all of this would demand further attention.<sup>34</sup>

These two changes make ‘ultimism II’ the disjunction of views claiming that there exists something that is metaphysically, axiologically, *or* soteriologically ultimate, in unlimited *or limited* ways. Together, the changes thus broaden which views to include as ultimate. In virtue of step 1, ultimism II would include as ultimate views that limit the Us, such as my functional God or Gross’s Emptiness. In virtue of step 2, ultimism II would include as ultimate views that drop a U or two, such as Bishop’s or Bacon’s end of being theologies.

As argued earlier, it is good for ultimism II to include these views because they are philosophically plausible, since they are responsive to the problems of suffering and incoherence and consonant with the prevailing scientific paradigm. These moves also allow ultimism II not to silence but rather to voice some non-ultimistic models.

It was already something of a challenge for Schellenberg (2009) to show in that  $UUU$  – non-specific as it is – could be the object of a robustly religious practice (can you worship something that is God *or* Brahman *or* the Dao?). It will be even

more of a challenge to show that UUU' can be so, since it is more diffuse and limited than UUU. I think in the end that both UUU and UUU' are robust religious objects for the nones and the somes – and maybe even for some of the 'ones', for those with a single religious affiliation – though that is all another story.<sup>35</sup>

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## Notes

1. For more on the nones, see Putnam & Campbell (2010).
2. Schellenberg (2005, 2007, 2009).
3. Schellenberg (2009), 31.
4. *Ibid.*, 31.
5. In fact, after extended arguments in *Skepticism* against a personal God, he seems to favour UUU's being impersonal.
6. The first quote is from Schellenberg (2009), xii and the second from Schellenberg (2005), 17, the broadest statement I have found in the trilogy about who exactly experiences 'the ultimate good' by relating to UUU. Many glosses of the soteriological component mention no object at all, saying merely

- that UUU is 'the source of an ultimate good' (Schellenberg (2009), xii); others focus on humans (Schellenberg (2005), 15; (2009), 31). Perhaps Schellenberg's non-specificity here is part of his aim to keep UUU general. If so, he could emphasize more the possibility of the entire universe's fulfilment in UUU, along with ours.
7. Puligandla (2013), 5.
  8. Schellenberg (2005), 16. Schellenberg's example is the 'passionate gym teacher' who might on a limited ultimism count as religious for having faith that gym is a very great good that is fundamental to human reality, etc. But certainly even she would not take gym to be an unlimited reality, unsurpassable in value, etc. And if somehow she did, then, as Schellenberg rightly intimates, why not count her as religious? (*ibid.*, 20 n. 22).
  9. To be more precise, there are possible degrees of ultimacy distinguished by whether the claim to ultimacy is what I will call 'actualized', 'maximized', or 'modalized'. An *actual* ultimate is the best in the actual world along the category in question (e.g. being actually ultimate in righteousness would mean sinning less than anyone else in the actual world, even if perchance it sins some); a *maximized* ultimate is unlimited in the actual world in this category (e.g. sinless in the actual world); a *modalized* ultimate is the best in all possible worlds in this category (e.g. impeccability, sinless in every world). Schellenberg seems to be committed only to maximized ultimacy in his 'unlimited' language, though he indicated in correspondence that he had modalized ultimacy in mind throughout the trilogy.
  10. E.g. Schellenberg (2009), 12. See also *ibid.*, 31 for explicit reference to the conjunction.
  11. Schellenberg (2009), 104–105.
  12. In fact, the idea of UUU alone, again quite apart from its reality, might elicit 'fake' versions of each of Otto's *mysterium*, *tremendum*, and *fascinans*, in the same way that seeing a scary movie elicits what Kendall Walton calls 'fake fear', etc. See Otto (1958) and Walton (1990).
  13. Schellenberg (2013), *Religious Studies*, 49, 145.
  14. He offers a fuller argument in Schellenberg (2005), 33–37, but these two pieces are the heart of it.
  15. Schellenberg (2009), xi, xii, and 15.
  16. Cicero gestures at 'universal religion' in *The Tusculan Disputations*, Book I, XIV. Bahá'u'lláh founded the Bahá'í faith, whose official website says the world's religions come 'from the same Source and are in essence successive chapters of one religion from God' (<[www.bahai.org](http://www.bahai.org), homepage, accessed 2/13/12>). For Huxley, see Huxley (1945); for Hick, see Hick (2004).
  17. See Mann (2010), Gross (2013b), and Clarke (2013), respectively.
  18. Schellenberg (2005), 19–20.
  19. *Ibid.*, 23–37.
  20. For an array of models of the ultimate and in-depth discussions of those referenced here and many more, see Diller & Kasher (2013).
  21. See *ibid.*
  22. They include views by Augustine, Anselm, Al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd (Averroes), Aquinas, Maimonides, Whitehead, Hartshorne, and many more. Again, see Diller & Kasher (2013).
  23. Diller (1999).
  24. See Bishop (2007), reprinted in Diller & Kasher (2013). For more details on end of being theology, see the introduction to the section 'Ground, Start and End of Being Theologies' and the section itself in Diller & Kasher (2013).
  25. Bacon (2013); Gross (2013a), esp. 7.
  26. Schellenberg (2005), 24.
  27. *Ibid.*, 34.
  28. *Ibid.*, 23ff.
  29. If we need an alternative definition, I would propose using a version of Mary Kay Fisher's in her celebrated introductory text to the world's religions: the human attempt to connect with what is perceived as 'greater' realities which 'lie beyond or ... infuse' the natural world (Fisher (2008), 1). This makes most of what we take to be religious to count as such.
  30. More examples of claims that need limiting: 'Sceptical religion can be spiritually authentic and fulfilling' (Schellenberg (2013), 145); 'If the ... reason's demands' (Schellenberg (2009), 67).
  31. These traditions may have other non-philosophical benefits. Discussion in this paragraph based on, 'Our Unitarian Universalist Principles', <<http://www.uua.org>> and 'The Baha'i Concept of God', <<http://www.bahai.org>>, both accessed on 3 March 2012.

32. In the terms introduced in note 9, this means having just actualized rather than maximized or modalized ultimacy.
33. Schellenberg (2009), 31.
34. Mu & Au & Su seems ultimate (original ultimism), as do Mu & Su (Bacon's considered view of God as <Creator, Good> which he takes to be a 'let-down' axiologically), Au & Su (Bishop's view of God as Divine Love that is neither the efficient nor the material cause of the universe), and even Su *per se* (the ultimate as purely the fulfilment of our being, as in the first few pages of Bacon (2013)). I am less clear that Mu & Au (e.g. a perfect creator that is somehow not our highest good) is ultimate, since it is not worthy of worship. This may suggest that Su is necessary for being ultimate.
35. See Diller (unpublished).